(54) Title: SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR PROVIDING INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY IT EXPERT REFERRAL OVER A NETWORK

(57) Abstract: A system and method for assigning an IT expert to a request for assistance. The invention allows users to request assistance over the Internet to an IT expert server having a file of qualified IT experts. The trouble "ticket" is assigned and alias and is sent out to a number of IT experts having the correct qualifications who then have an opportunity to respond. The first to respond is assigned an alias and communicates with the requester via the IT expert server. Upon completion of the ticket, the IT expert so designates and the requester is asked to fill out a survey noting the satisfaction with the service provided. IT experts are assigned rankings and are paid and solicited for further work based upon the ranking.

1   **Title of Invention:**   System and Method for Providing Information Technology IT

2   Expert Referral Over a Network

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4   **Relationship to Other Applications:**

5   This application is a utility application which claims the benefit and priority of

6   Provisional Application No. 60/167,065 entitled "System and Method for Providing Expert

7   Help Over a Network" filed 11/23/99.

8   **Field of the Invention:**

9   This invention relates generally to network access to for IT expert referral. More

10   particularly the present invention provides a system and method for obtaining assistance via

11   network notification to information technology (IT) experts and subsequent IT expert-to-

12   customer contact.

13   **Background of the Invention:**

14   As computers and software proliferate, the need for help desk assistance becomes

15   more and more critical especially to those customers who are not technically sophisticated.

16   The difficulty is that individual customers become frustrated when they must sit on a help

17   line for many hours before they get human assistance or, equally frustrating, are shunted to a

18   frequently asked question screen, which has the answers to many questions that are not

19   helpful for the particular problem that the individual customer is experiencing.

20   The present invention seeks to solve these problems by qualifying and establishing a

21   large number of IT experts in various hardware and software fields. For example, the present

22   invention will solicit and store qualifications for IT experts in Microsoft Windows, Sun

23   products, Apple products, and indeed, many other hardware and software products. These IT

24   expert, most of whom will be independent contractors (although not necessarily so), will be

25   directly accessible via the database of the present invention.

1   After registration with the system of the present invention and providing customer

2   contact information such as telephone number and email, when a customer needs particular

3   assistance with a particular product, the customer will access the website of the present

4   invention and state the problem being experienced. Once a query for help is made, the

5   system of the present invention sends a pager or other notification signal to an appropriate IT

6   expert who can handle the problem being experienced by the customer. Indeed, a call may

7   go out to multiple IT experts all of whom have the option to respond to the particular request.

8   Contact information is also presented to the IT experts in this first communication.

9   Whichever IT expert responds first to the request, that IT expert will have the contact

10 information to immediately contact the customer experiencing the problem. In this fashion,

11 one of the key problem areas, that is time of responding to a problem, is minimized.

12   The customer can then respond either via email through the server of the present

13 invention to the customer or via Internet telephone through the server of the present invention

14 to the customer. In either case response goes through the server of the present invention in

15 order to be able to track such statistics as response time, and whether the customer was

16 satisfied or dissatisfied with the response of the particular IT expert.

17   Once the problem is solved, the customer who experienced the problem is given the

18 option of responding to a questionnaire simply asking if the problem was solved, if the IT

19 expert was responsive to the question, and several other key questions that will assist the

20 system of the present invention in evaluating the performance of the IT expert.

21   Statistics will be kept on the performance of IT experts involved in the system. For

22 those IT experts who continually rank highly, calls for assistance will continue to go to those

23 IT experts on a priority basis. For those IT experts who are not as successful, they will fall

24 lower in the priority list and will not receive as many calls for assistance from the system.

1   A key aspect of the present invention is that the system is adaptive. If an Expert who

2   is lower on the priority list continues to get high grades from customers for accomplishing

3   tasks, that Expert can climb in the rankings and achieve a priority ranking thereby receiving

4   more request for assistance and hence, more revenue from responding to customers needs.

5   Conversely, those IT experts who do not receive favorable rankings from customers will fall

6   in the overall rankings of IT experts and will not receive as many phone calls for assistance

7   an hence, will not receive as much revenue from the present invention.

8   All transactions, in the preferred embodiment occur via the Internet, although this not

9   meant as a limitation, whether they be by email, or Internet telephone. It will be apparent to

10   those skilled in the art that communication between customer and Expert can also occur via

11   telephone as well. And all transactions will proceed through the server of the present

12   invention so that activities of IT experts and statistics on types and frequencies of certain

13   troubled calls can be monitored.

14   In summary what is created is a virtual help desk, having IT experts in many different

15   areas of IT expertise immediately and competently responding to the queries for help from

16   customers who are in need.

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18   **Brief Description of the Figures:**

19   Figure 1 illustrates the architecture of the present invention.

20   Figure 2 illustrates the overall assign up, assignment, and Expert response flow of the

21   present invention.

22   Figure 3 illustrates the Expert enrollment and interaction with the system of the

23   present invention.

24   Figure 4 illustrates login screen for the Expert Help Network.

1   Figure 5 illustrates a screen in which the customer selects whether he needs help or is

2   an IT expert.

3   Figure 6 illustrates a screen consisting of a data entry sheet requesting a plurality of

4   answers pertaining to customer identification.

5   Figure 7 illustrates the customer's customer ID and password for entering the Expert

6   Help Network.

7   Figure 8 illustrates a screen which confirms the customer's Name, city, and email

8   address that is currently valid in the system.

9   Figure 9 illustrates a plurality of questions pertaining to the customer's problem.

10   Figure 10 illustrates a plurality of items of information regarding the customer's

11   ticket.

12   Figure 11 illustrates a plurality of statuses regarding the customer's ticket(s).

13   Figure 12 illustrates a plurality of criteria for IT experts to join the Expert Help

14   Network.

15   Figure 13 illustrates a plurality of questions and answers pertaining to IT experts.

16   Figure 14 illustrates a synopsis of how the network functions and the role of IT

17   experts.

18   Figure 15 illustrates a plurality of requests for items of information regarding contact

19   information for the IT expert(s).

20   Figure 16 illustrates a plurality of pull down menus regarding the IT expert's skills.

21   Figure 17 illustrates a request for a plurality of items of information regarding

22   experience as an IT expert.

23   Figure 18 illustrates a plurality of items of information regarding references for IT

24   experts.

1   Figure 19 illustrates the conceptual flow for assigning an alias to customer problems

2   and IT expert's assignments.

3   **Detailed Description of the Invention**

4   Referring to Figure 1, the overall architecture of the present invention is illustrated.

5   A plurality of customers, indeed anyone connected to the internet 9or a network

6   contemplated as one to be used with the present invention, her illustrated simply as two

7   customers, customers **10** and **12**, who are connected to the internet, may experience some

8   form of computer-related or other type of problem. Customers **10, 12** contact the Expert

9   Reference Server (ER Server) **16** via a network, preferably the Internet **14** although this is not

10   meant as a limitation. For example other networks in addition to the Internet can also be

11   used. Customers **10, 12** pose the particular question or problem being encountered with their

12   system to the ER Server **16** over the network **14.**

13   Depending upon the type of problem cited, ER Server **16** reviews its database of IT

14   experts **20** for the individual or individuals who are capable of responding to the questions

15   from customers **10, 12**. This database of IT experts not only has qualifications of the IT

16   experts but also maintains a database of their availability if, for example, an Expert is on

17   vacation for a period of time or is unavailable during a period of the day. Upon determining

18   the appropriate individual(s) who can respond to the problem, ER Server **16** sends a message

19   via any means known in the art such as wired or wireless as in the case of beepers and cell

20   phones, in this case illustrated as over the public switch telephone network (PSTN) **18** to the

21   beepers of IT experts **22, 24, 26** with a general reference to the type of problem being

22   encountered. This notification via PSTN is for illustrative purposes only. It is anticipated

23   that the IT experts can also be notified via the Internet and the various means, such as

24   Internet paging and telephone for example, available via the Internet.

1   IT experts **22, 24, 26** are beeped and, preferably an alphanumeric display noting the

2   problem being posed by customers **10, 12** is displayed. At that point any one of the IT

3   experts **22, 24, 26** can respond to ER Server **16** that he will handle the problem being posed.

4   Contact from IT experts **22, 24**, and **26** can occur via the public switch telephone

5   network **18** or via the network **14** to the ER Server **16**.

6   Thereafter, and assuming, for example expert **22** responded **first** to the query, ER

7   Server **16** allows contact between expert **22** and, for example customer **12** in the following

8   fashion:

9   Internet telephone service can be used whereby expert **22** is connected to customer **12**

10   through server **16**. In this fashion, ER Server **16** can monitor the length of the call and broker

11   the connection between expert **22** and customer **12**. Alternatively, the telephone number of

12   customer **12** can be provided to expert **22**. Thereafter, expert **22** can contact customer **12** to

13   solve the problem by voice communication. Finally, ER Server **16** can provide the email

14   address of customer **12** to expert **22** thereby allowing email response to the problem being

15   posed and also allowing back and forth communication over network **14**.

16   After the completion of the service call, expert **22** provides notification to ER Server

17   **16** that the call has been successfully completed. Expert Server **16** logs the completion time

18   and date of the trouble call that was requested by the customer. In this way, statistics on the

19   general length of time to respond to and solve customer problems can be logged. Further,

20   information on the individual expert can also be kept in the following fashion:

21   ER Server **16** not only brokers a trouble call between customers **10, 12** and IT experts

22   **22, 24**, and **26**, but also keeps track of how well the individual IT experts perform in their

23   assigned tasks. For example, at the completion of each trouble call, and after the expert has

24   provided notification to the ER Server that the call has been completed, the ER Server

25   provides a questionnaire to the customers **10, 12** seeking input on customer satisfaction with

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1   the service being offered. At that point, customers 10, 12 have the opportunity to respond to

2   ER Server 16 regarding whether the IT experts 22, 24, or 26 solved the problem successfully

3   and in a timely fashion.

4   ER Server 16 collects statistics on the performance of IT experts 22, 24, and 26,

5   thereby monitoring the performance of these IT experts. If any of the IT experts continually

6   score poorly in the estimation of customers 10, 12, the ranking of that particular expert will

7   be established as lower than that of the IT experts who perform successfully on various

8   assigned tasks. This has several ramifications. If a particular expert does not perform well,

9   that expert is put low on the priority list for being contacted by ER Server 16. If the expert

10   continues to perform poorly on the tasks that are assigned, eventually the expert will be

11   eliminated from the roll of IT experts who can respond to service calls. Conversely, if an

12   individual expert who initially performed poorly begins to perform better on service calls

13   assigned to that IT expert, ER Server 16 will keep track of that improvement thereby raising

14   the priority of that expert and list of IT experts who will be called to respond to service calls.

15   In this fashion, expert database 20 is continually updated and quality control on the IT

16   experts who are contacted and assigned customer tasks can therefore be maintained.

17   In this fashion, a series of problems are solved by the system and method of the

18   present invention. First, individual customers 10, 12 no longer have to wait inordinate

19   amounts of time for response to trouble calls on their computer systems.

20   Server 16 establishes the mutual arrangement between customers 10 and 12 before

21   any service call is made to IT experts 22, 24, and 26. In this fashion, IT experts 22, 24, and

22   26 do not have to be concerned about how to invoice and collect fees from customers 10, 12.

23   Customers 10, 12 benefit from having the best IT experts who can solve technical

24   problems since the ER Server 16 continually updates and establishes quality control via its

1   expert database **20** over the IT experts who are called to respond to trouble calls in the first

2   place.

3   On a periodic basis, ER Server **16** and the business entity that surrounds that server,

4   remits to IT experts **22, 24,** and **26** their fees for the service calls responded to on a monthly

5   or quarterly basis as desired.

6   Referring now to **Figure 2** the overall assign up, assignment, and expert response

7   flow of the present invention is illustrated. A customer accesses the system of the present

8   invention **100** preferably over the Internet although this is not meant as a limitation. For

9   example, a customer may also provide information via a telephone or other means of

10 communication.

11   Confirmation of the sign-up is then sent to the member via electronic mail **102**

12 providing a log in ID and password. Thereafter, either immediately upon receipt of the e-

13 mail or on a subsequent occasion when services are needed the member logs into the system

14 **104**. At this point the member has a number of options.

15   If the member is signing on initially the member can create or change the membership

16 profile **148**. This profile provides information on the member's organization, the type of

17 equipment, and any other information relating to software and operating systems being run

18 on the equipment and the network as appropriate.

19   The member also has the option of changing the member's password **150**. If the

20 member has already provided a request for assistance referred to as a "ticket" a member can

21 view the ticket history **152**. If the ticket relates to a particular problem that the member has

22 asked to be solved, the member can view the specific ticket **154** to insure that the problem

23 has been stated appropriately. Additionally the member is asked to fill out a survey **156** that

24 relates to how well the problem was solved, was the problem solved in a timely way, was the

25 interaction with the Expert satisfactory and other factors that would give rise to quality

1   assurance with respect to managing the IT experts who are affiliated with the system of the

2   present invention. After the survey is completed it is submitted by the member **158** and the

3   ticket is closed by the system. Thereafter billing for the services is accomplished **159**.

4   Once the member has an account number and a password, the member can call in at

5   any time whenever there is a problem requiring a consultant. In this instance, a member logs

6   onto the system **104** and creates a ticket **106** which describes the difficulty being encountered

7   in as much detail as possible. Once the screen detailing the problem has been completed the

8   ticket is submitted **108** by the member. Confirmation email is sent to the member. The

9   server of the present invention then takes the ticket that is submitted and e-mails it **110** to the

10   appropriate IT expert group for response. In this instance the group may be a group of

11   network IT experts, a group of IT experts in a particular software application, and the like. It

12   should also be noted that communication with the IT expert groups is made by regular e-mail

13   and wireless devices to the extent that the database has the appropriate communication

14   information. This system then continually inquires to determine if any IT expert has

15   responded to the ticket and indicated that he or she would respond. This is referred to as

16   "booking" the ticket **112**. If after a definable number of minutes the ticket is still not booked

17   **114** the system sends e-mails to another group of IT experts who can appropriately respond

18   to the question being posed.

19   If the ticket has been booked by an IT expert **112** the system determines how the

20   ticket was booked **116**. If the IT expert responded over the Internet the Internet procedures

21   invoked **117** as will be more fully explained below.

22   If the IT expert responded via e-mail the IT experts e-mail response is received by the

23   system **118** and the system assigns the ticket to the IT expert who responded **120**.

24   Upon assigning the ticket to the IT expert **120** an e-mail or other notification is sent to

25   the IT expert requesting that he initiate customer contact. In addition, e-mail is sent to other

1   IT experts in the group of IT experts to whom e-mail was sent informing them that the ticket

2   was booked to another IT expert **124** although the identify of the IT expert to whom the ticket

3   was booked is not necessarily disclosed.

4   As further noted below, communication and record keeping of the system involves

5   assigning alias numbers to both the request for assistance and for the response by the IT

6   expert in order to ensure that communication flows through the server of the present

7   invention.

8   The IT expert then communicates with the member **128** and the member interacts with the IT

9   expert **126** to solve the problem disclosed in the ticket.

10   When the ticket has been closed, that is, the problem has been solved by the IT

11   expert, the IT expert so notifies the server of the present invention to close the ticket and

12   enters information that describes how the problem was resolved **130**. The server then sends

13   an e-mail message to the member **132** noting that the IT expert has closed the ticket and has

14   solved the problem. The e-mail also requests that the member fill out a survey to note the

15   members satisfaction with the problem solution, the IT experts performance, and any other

16   factor that affects the resolution of the ticket originally submitted by the member.

17   The survey is a critical aspect of the present invention and is done in an automated

18   fashion to minimize the labor associated with the member's participation in the survey.

19   Further, the survey serves as a basis for paying IT experts for work accomplished or not

20   paying IT experts when the result has been unsatisfactory to the member.

21   After submission of the survey to the member, the system continually inquiries in its

22   own records to determine if the survey report has been filled out **134**. If the survey has not

23   been filled out after two days, a second e-mail request for the completion of the survey is sent

24   to the customer **136**. The system then again keeps track internally to determine if the survey

25   has been filled out **138**. If the survey has not been filled out after, for example two days, a

1   final e-mail request is sent to the member **140** to fill the survey out. The system then again

2   internally monitors whether the survey has been completed **142**. If the survey has not been

3   completed the survey is automatically filled in with certain default values and the ticket

4   status is changed to a "closed" status **144**. Thereafter billing of the member ensues **145**.

5   When the member is in the process of completing the survey the member logs in **146**

6   and views the ticket history **152**.

7   The member can then complete the survey as noted earlier **156** and submit that survey

8   to the system **158**. Thereafter billing ensues.

9   Referring now to **Figure 3** the IT expert enrollment and interaction with the system is

10   illustrated. An IT expert initially logs onto the system of the present invention and signs up

11   to become an IT expert **160** who can be called upon to satisfy various tickets. The system of

12   the present invention then sends an e-mail to the IT expert **162** confirming his registration

13   and informing him of the pending assessment of the IT expert qualifications, and that this

14   will take place BEFORE the IT expert is assigned any tickets by the system. In this way the

15   entity managing the server of the present invention ascertains the IT expert's qualifications

16   and areas of IT expertise. If the IT expert is not qualified in any of the areas in which the

17   system responds to members an e-mail is sent to the IT experts so notifying the IT expert. If

18   the IT expert has the requisite qualifications a confirmation e-mail is sent to the IT expert **168**

19   and the IT expert is then logged onto the system. The IT expert is assigned a password and

20   customer identification number for which the IT expert can then log in **170**.

21   At any point the IT expert can change or alter the IT expert's profile **172** thereby

22   allowing the IT expert to more particularly respond to and be provided with information on

23   tickets.

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1   When the IT expert logs in **170** the IT expert can check in and out of the system **174**

2   and change the IT expert's availability **176** so that the system knows when the IT expert will

3   be available to receive requests for ticket response.

4   The IT expert can also note the IT experts own tickets **178** that have been responded

5   to, assigned and are in progress. The IT expert can click on any ticket that is noted and view

6   a specific ticket **180** and determine if the ticket has been closed **182**. If the ticket is not

7   closed, it continues to be listed on those open tickets assigned to the IT expert **178**. If the

8   ticket is closed as far as the IT expert is concerned, the IT expert assigns a "close pending" to

9   the ticket as noted earlier in Figure 2 **130**.

10   Once the IT expert logs in **170** the IT expert can also go to a file of unassigned tickets

11   **184** and view any specific one ticket **186** and determine if the IT expert can respond to the

12   ticket. If the IT expert can respond the IT expert will book the ticket as noted earlier in

13   Figure 2 **120**.

14   Upon entering the website, **Fig. 4**, the customer is presented with a login screen

15   which asks also whether the customer is an IT expert or needs help **200**. If the customer is not

16   a member of the service, he is presented with a screen, **Fig 5**, in which he must select

17   whether he needs help or he is an IT expert **202**.

18   If the customer selects the "I need help" option **202**, the customer is presented with a

19   screen, **Fig. 6**, which consists of a data entry sheet requesting a plurality of answers

20   pertaining to customer identification **204**. Upon completion of the data entry sheet, **Fig. 6**,

21   the customer is presented with a screen, **Fig. 7**, which furnishes the customer with his

22   customer ID and password **206**.

23   In the Customer Home screen **Fig. 8**, which confirms the customer's Name, City, and

24   email address **208** that is currently valid in the system. Upon selecting "View/Create Ticket"

25   the customer is presented with a screen, **Fig. 9**, which asks whether this is a new ticket **210**

1   and under what category this ticket is to be considered **212**. Examples of categories are MS

2   Exchange, Windows NT, etc. Additionally, the customer is furnished with a text box in

3   which he enters a description of his current problem **214**. The customer is also presented

4   with a button which allow him to enter the ticket **216**.

5   Once the ticket is entered, the customer is presented with a screen, **Fig. 10**, which

6   furnishes a plurality of items of information regarding the customer's ticket **218**. The

7   customer is notified by the IT expert via email (although this is not meant as a limitation)

8   when he has been assigned to the trouble call **220** by the server.

9   If the customer selects "Ticket History," **222** he is presented with a screen, **Fig. 11**,

10   which furnishes a plurality of statuses regarding his ticket(s) **224**.

11   If the customer selects the "I am an IT expert" option **200**, the customer is presented

12   with a screen, **Fig. 12**, which gives some of the criteria for IT experts to join the IT expert

13   Help Network **226**. If the customer selects the "FAQ" (frequently asked questions) button

14   **228**, he is presented with a screen, **Fig. 13**, which answers a number of question pertaining to

15   IT experts and the IT expert Help Network.

16   If the customer selects the "How it works" button **230**, he is presented with a screen,

17   **Fig. 14**, which gives a synopsis of how the IT expert Help Network functions and the

18   function of IT experts in the network.

19   If the customer selects the "Sign up" button **232**, he is presented with a screen, **Fig.**

20   **15**, which furnishes a plurality of requests for items of information regarding contact

21   information for the IT expert **234**. Upon selecting the "Next" button **236**, the customer is

22   presented with a screen, **Fig. 16**, with a plurality of pull down menus regarding his skills **238**.

23   If the customer selects the "Next" button **236**, he is presented with a screen, **Fig. 17**,

24   which requests a plurality of items of information regarding his experience as an IT expert

25   **240**. If the customer selects the "Next" button **236**, he is presented with a screen, **Fig. 18**,

1   which requests a plurality of items of information regarding references as well as a text box

2   for entering data pertinent to the reference **242**.

3   Referring to **Figure 19**, the present invention performs an "aliasing" function

4   to both ensure that communication between the ultimate client and the IT expert occurs

5   through the server of the present invention.

6   When a ticket is open **250**, the server creates an alias **252** for the ticket that is open.

7   This alias is assigned to not only the ticket, but is associated with the person or entity that is

8   having the particular problem. In this fashion, the server can always determine who the point

9   of contact is at the customer entity for billing and survey purposes.

10   The ticket number with the associated alias is then made available to IT experts to

11   respond to. When an IT expert accepts the particular troubled ticket **254**, the IT expert is

12   assigned an alias **256** which is associated with the ticket alias created **252**. This IT expert

13   alias **256** varies from ticket to ticket so that a particular IT expert who accepts five different

14   tickets may in fact have five different aliases associated with the different tickets. All

15   communication with respect to the problem occurs via the server which then associates the

16   various ticket and IT expert aliases and ensures that communication reaches the ultimate

17   customer from the IT expert.

18   When the ticket is closed **258**, the various aliases are cleared **260** and these aliases are

19   subsequently made available for further tickets and aliases. Thus, the unique alias for the

20   ticket and for the IT expert accepting the ticket occur only so long as the ticket is opened.

21   Once the ticket is closed, the alias identifiers are made available again for re-use.

22   It will therefore be apparent to those skilled in the art that other variations of the

23   present invention in contacting IT experts via wired and wireless networks and in contacting

24   customers by the IT experts using both wired and wireless means can be achieved without

25   departing from the scope of the invention as disclosed.

1   I claim:

2   1.   A system for obtaining IT expert referral comprising:

3   A server further comprising a file of IT experts having qualifications;

4   A network connected to the server for allowing access to the file of IT experts;

5   At least one user computer connected to the network for submitting a request for

6   assistance ticket from a user and for accessing the file of IT experts in the server;

7   The server further comprising assignment instructions for assigning the request for

8   assistance ticket to at least one IT expert for response and for receiving a response

9   from the at least one IT expert to the assignment; and

10   The server further comprising communication instructions for facilitating the

11   communication between the IT expert and the user regarding the request for

12   assistance ticket.

13   2.   The system for obtaining IT expert referral of claim 1 wherein the server further

14   comprises instructions for registering and qualifying IT experts to be resident on

15   the file of IT experts.

16   3.   The system for obtaining IT expert referral of claim 2 wherein the assignment

17   instructions further comprise contact information for contacting a the plurality of

18   IT experts based upon IT expert qualifications.

19   4.   The system for obtaining IT expert referral of claim 1 wherein the server further

20   comprises instructions for sending a satisfaction questionnaire to the user upon

21   completion of the request for assistance ticket by the IT expert to whom the

22   request for assistance ticket was assigned.

23   5.   The system for obtaining IT expert referral of claim 4 wherein the server further

24   comprises instructions for creating a quality ranking for the IT expert to whom the

25   request for assistance ticket was assigned.

6.   The system for obtaining IT expert referral of claim 5 wherein the server further comprises instructions for paying to IT expert based upon the quality ranking from the user.

7.   The system for obtaining IT expert referral of claim 5 wherein the server further comprises instructions for rank ordering IT experts based upon quality ranking and assigning subsequent requests for assistance based upon quality rankings.

8.   The system for obtaining IT expert referral of claim 1 wherein the server further comprises instructions for assigning an alias to the request for assistance from a user and for assigning an alias to the IT expert who responds to the request for assistance.

9.   The system for obtaining IT expert referral of claim 8 wherein communication between the IT expert and the user occurs through the server and wherein the server comprises a file of assigned aliases for routing messages between the exert assigned to the request for assistance the user making the request for assistance.

10.   The system for obtaining IT expert referral of claim 2 wherein the instructions for registering and qualifying IT experts further comprises recording the availability of IT experts to respond to requests for assistance and the areas of IT expertise of the IT expert.

11.   The system for obtaining IT expert referral of claim 1 wherein the server further comprises instructions for allowing a user to view the a status of tickets for the user.

12.   A method for IT expert referral comprising:
        a user requesting assistance over a first network

1   a server receiving the request for assistance and creating a ticket associated with

2   the request

3   the server communicating the ticket to a plurality of qualified IT experts over a

4   second network;

5   at least on IT expert responding to the ticket

6   the server facilitating communication between the IT expert and the user to solve

7   the ticket.

8   13.   The method for IT expert referral of claim 12 wherein the plurality of IT experts

9   is created by registering IT experts and verifying their qualifications before

10   communicating the ticket to any one IT expert.

11   14.   The method for IT expert referral according to claim 12 wherein the first network

12   is the Internet and the second network is the Internet.

13   15.   The method for IT expert referral according to claim 12 wherein the first network

14   is the Internet and the second network is a PSTN.

15   16.   The method for IT expert referral according to claim 12 wherein the first network

16   is the Internet and the second network is a wireless network.

17   17.   The method for IT expert referral according to claim 12 wherein the facilitating of

18   communication comprises the server assigning an alias to the user and an alias to

19   the IT expert; and passing communication between the IT expert and the user

20   through the server by associating the user alias and the IT expert alias.

21   18.   The method for IT expert referral according to claim 12 further comprising the IT

22   expert closing the ticket with the server upon completion of the ticket by the IT

23   expert and the server submitting a satisfaction survey to the user upon the

24   completion of the ticket by the IT expert.

25   19.   The method for IT expert referral according to claim 18 further comprising paying

1   the IT experts based upon the satisfaction survey.

2   20. The method for IT expert referral according to claim 18 further comprising

3   creating a ranking of the IT expert based upon the satisfaction survey.

4   21. The method for IT expert referral according to claim 20 further comprising

5   assigning subsequent tickets to the IT expert based upon the IT expert ranking.

6   22. The method for IT expert referral according to claim 17 further comprising the

7   server clearing the aliases upon completion of the ticket.

8

Figure 1

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Fig. 2

Fig. 3

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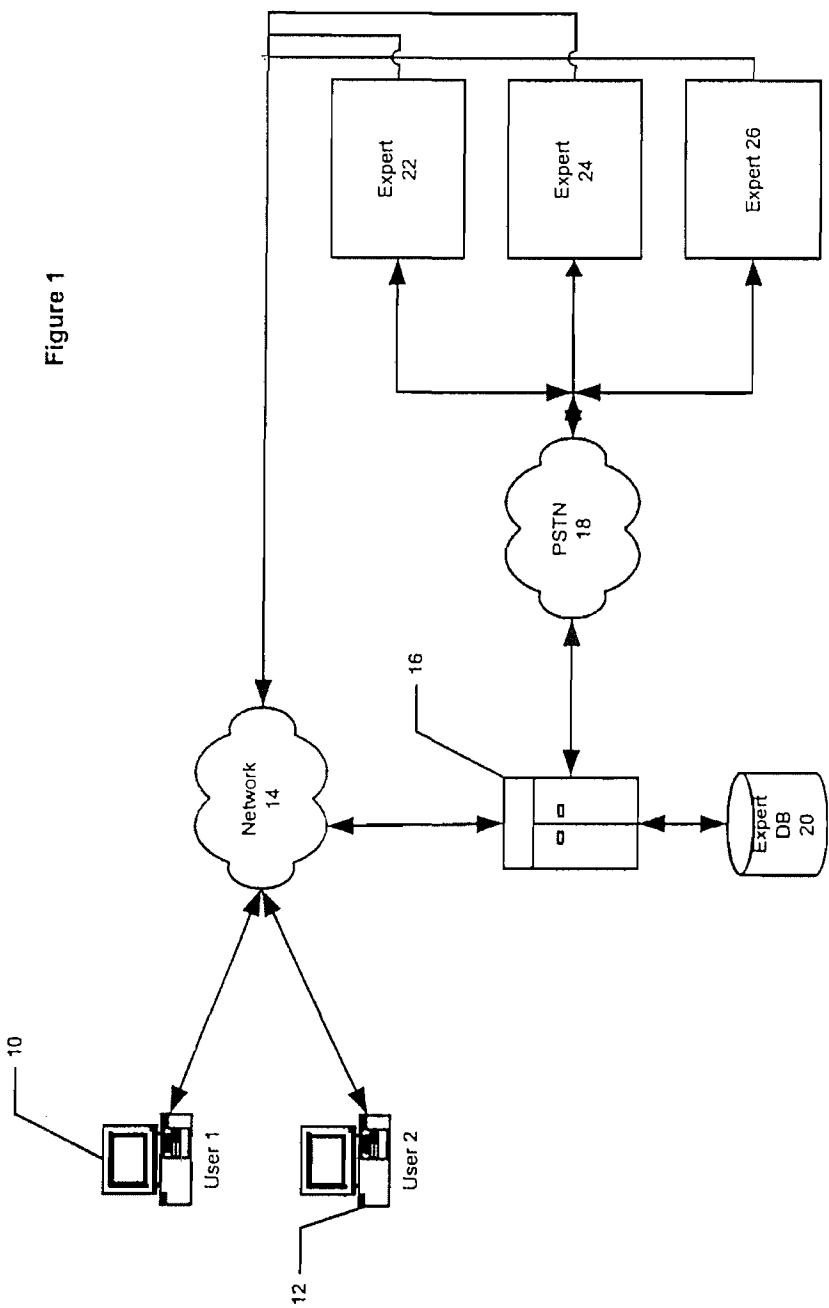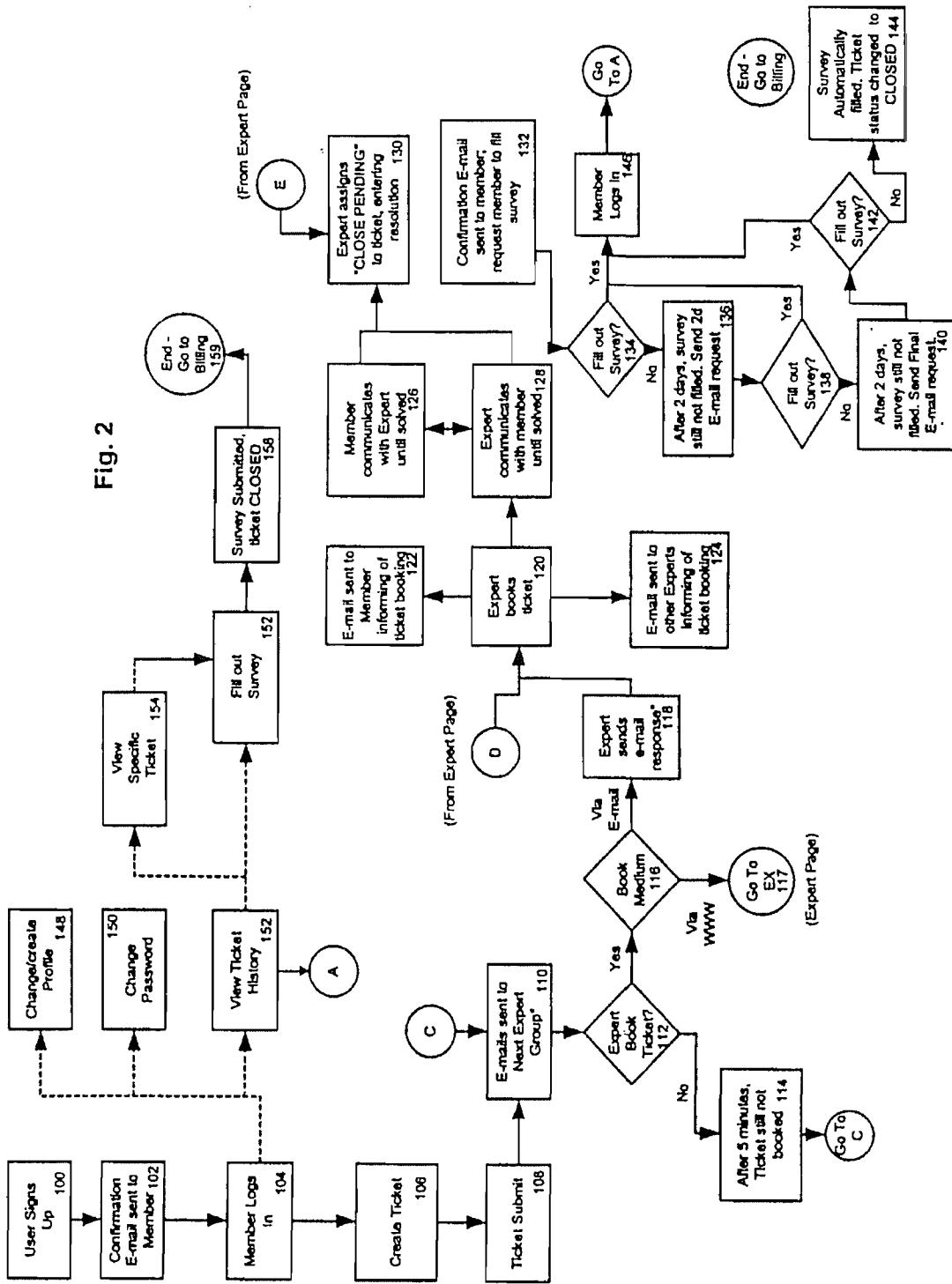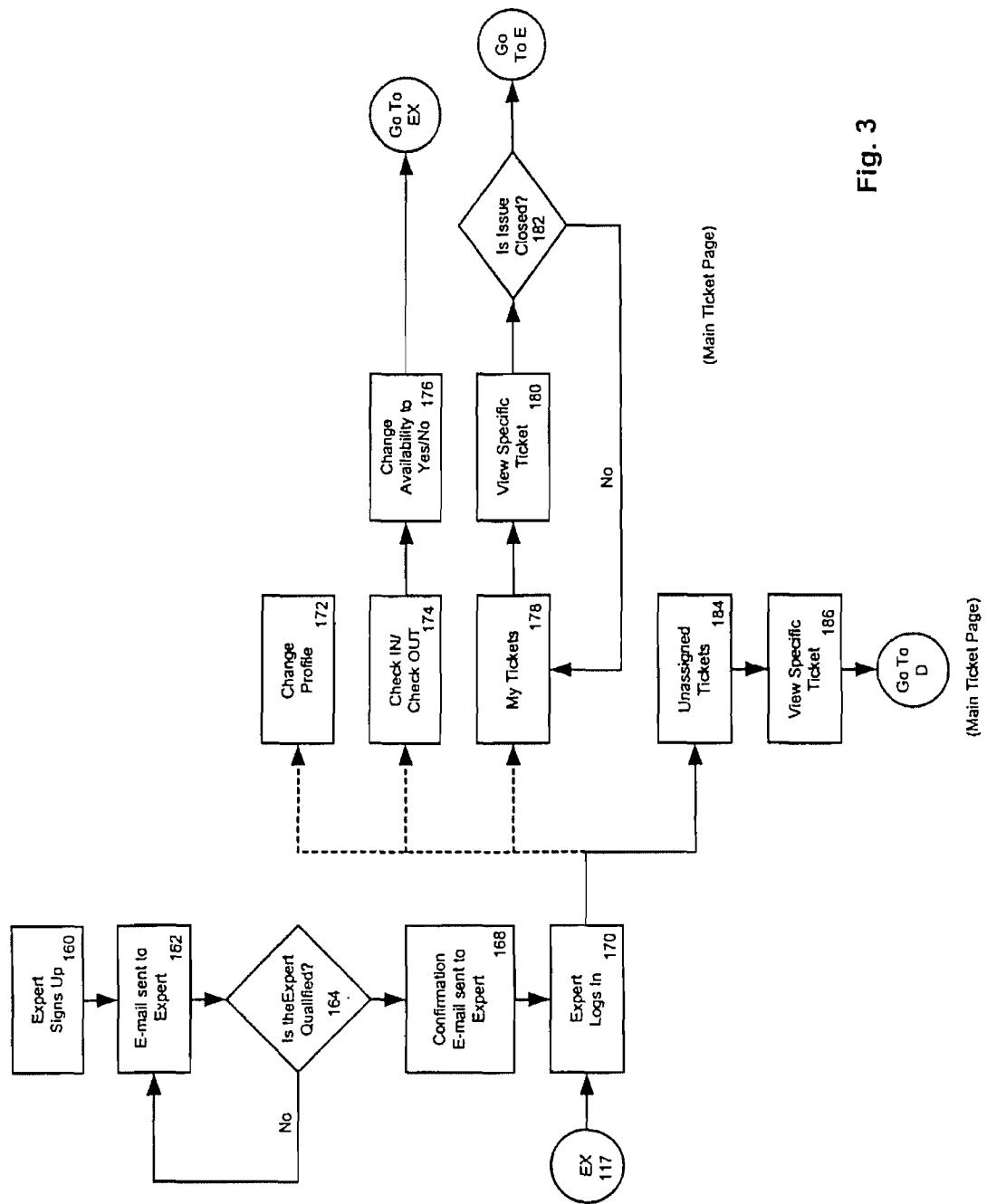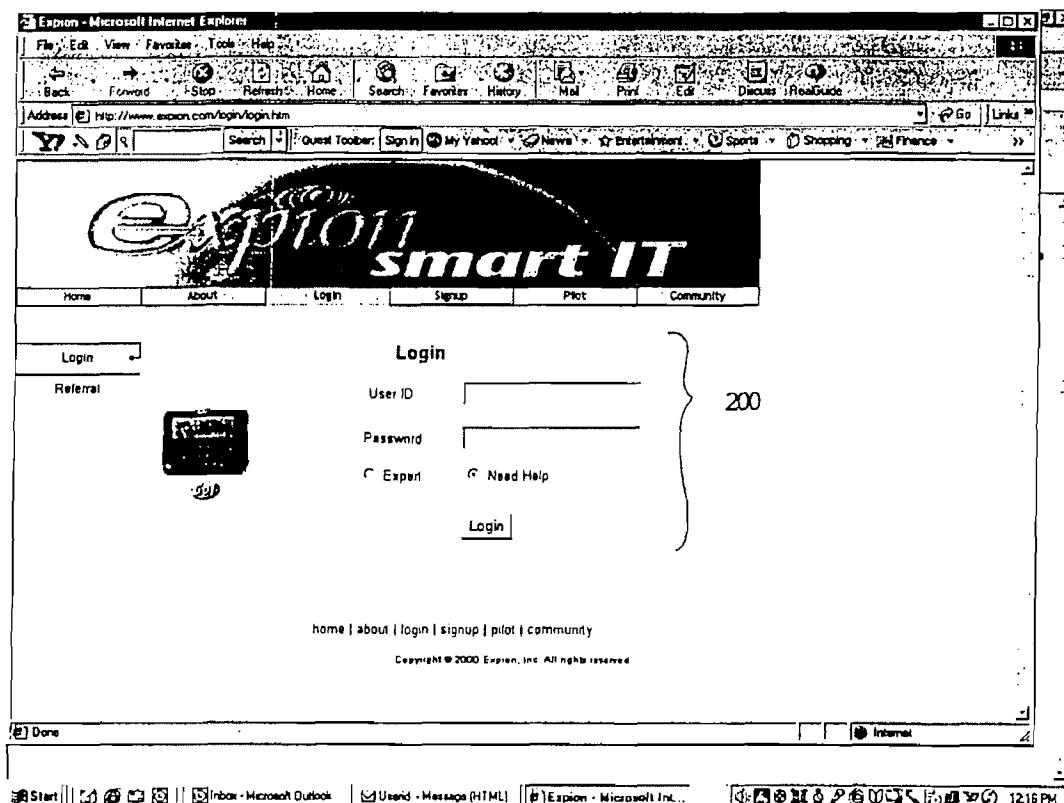
FIGURE 4

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FIGURE 5

FIGURE 6

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Welcome to E-Helpnet.com

Member John Smith added. You can start using our services by loging in and using your credentials:

user ID. Jsmith@aol.com
password: 131#24 ~206

home | about | login | signup | free trial | community

FIGURE 7

FIGURE 8

FIGURE 9

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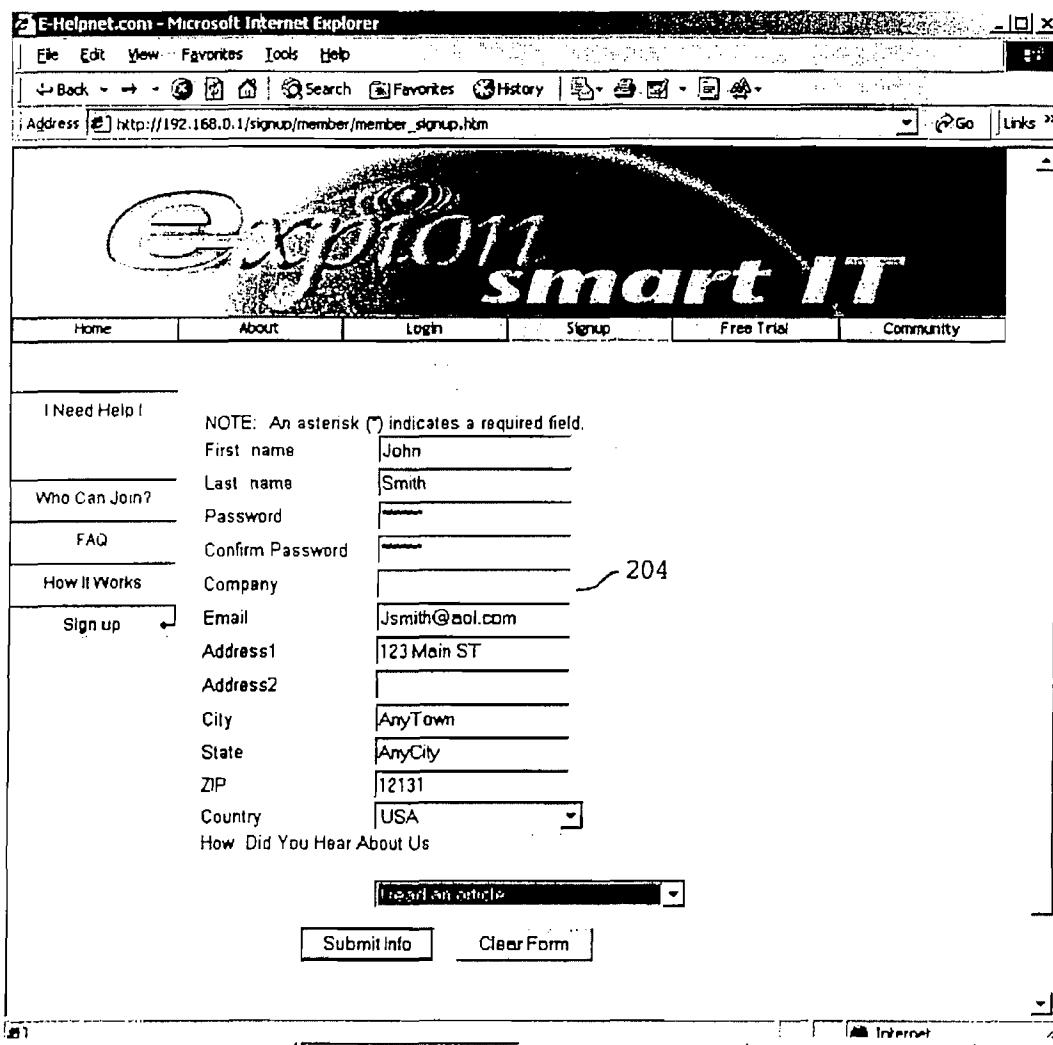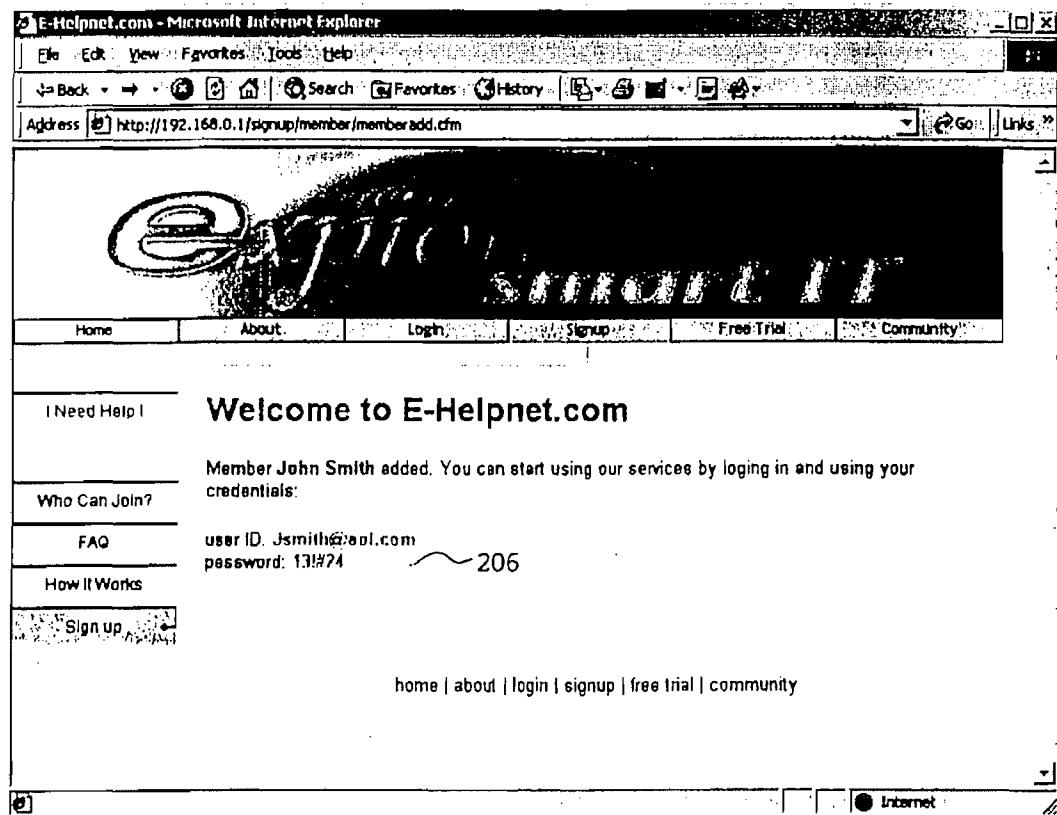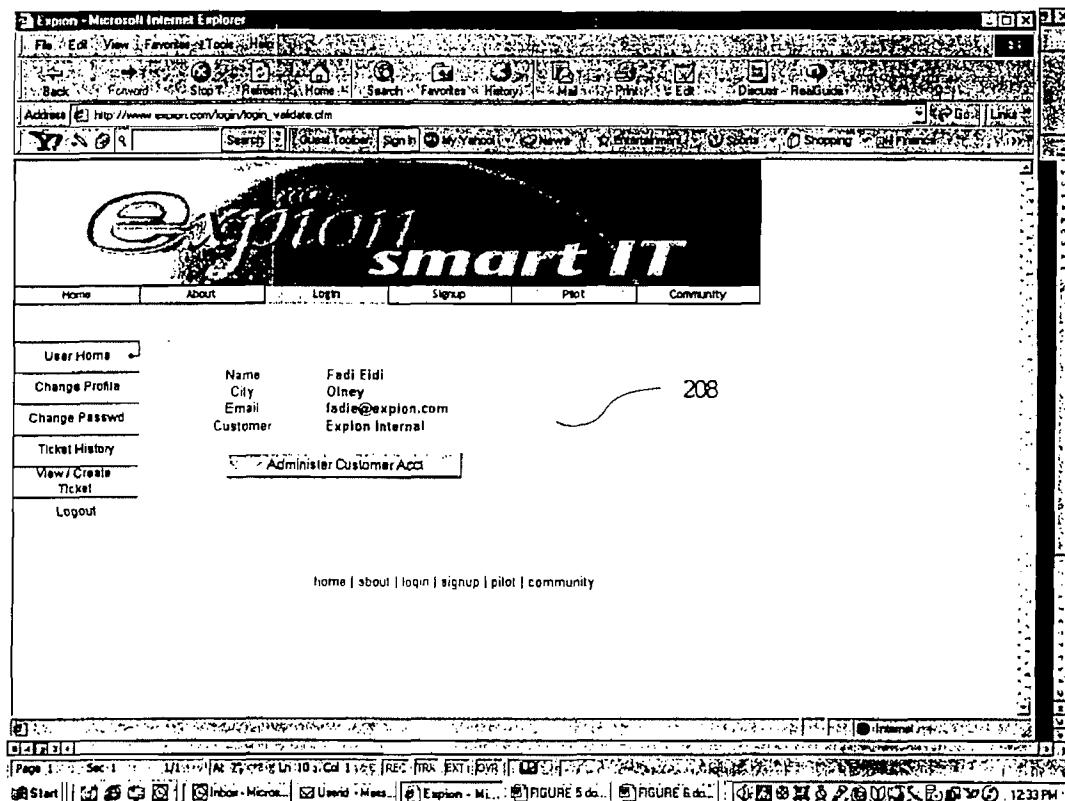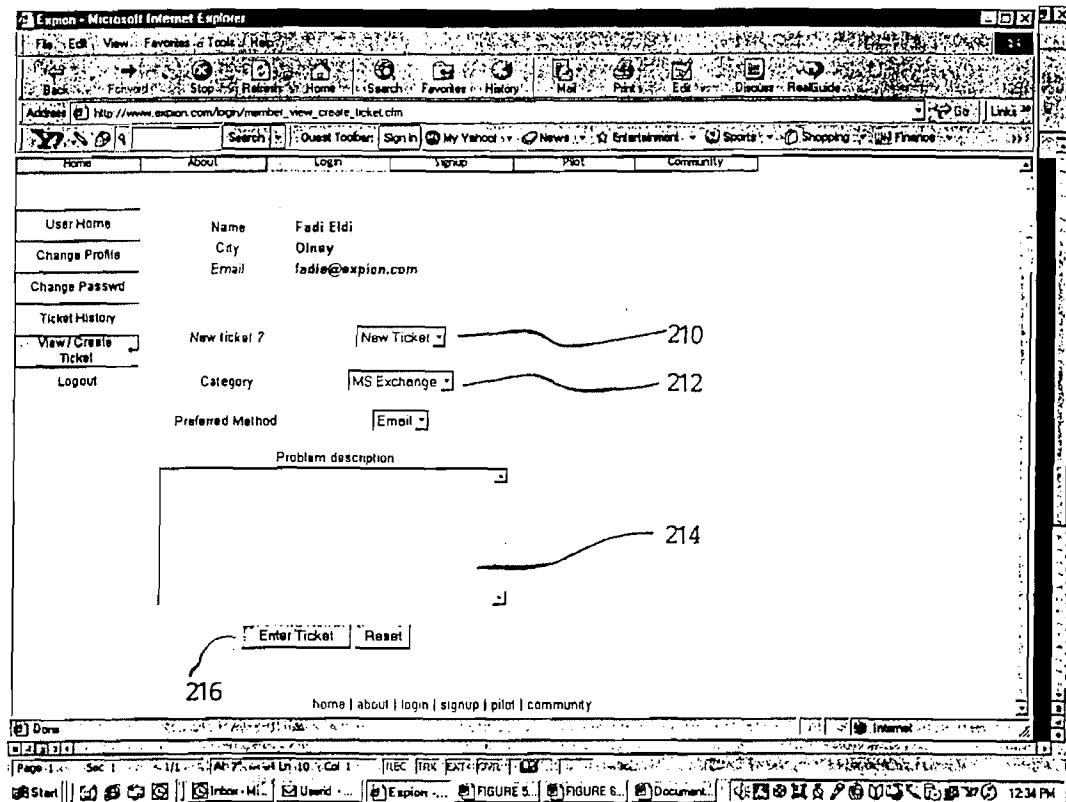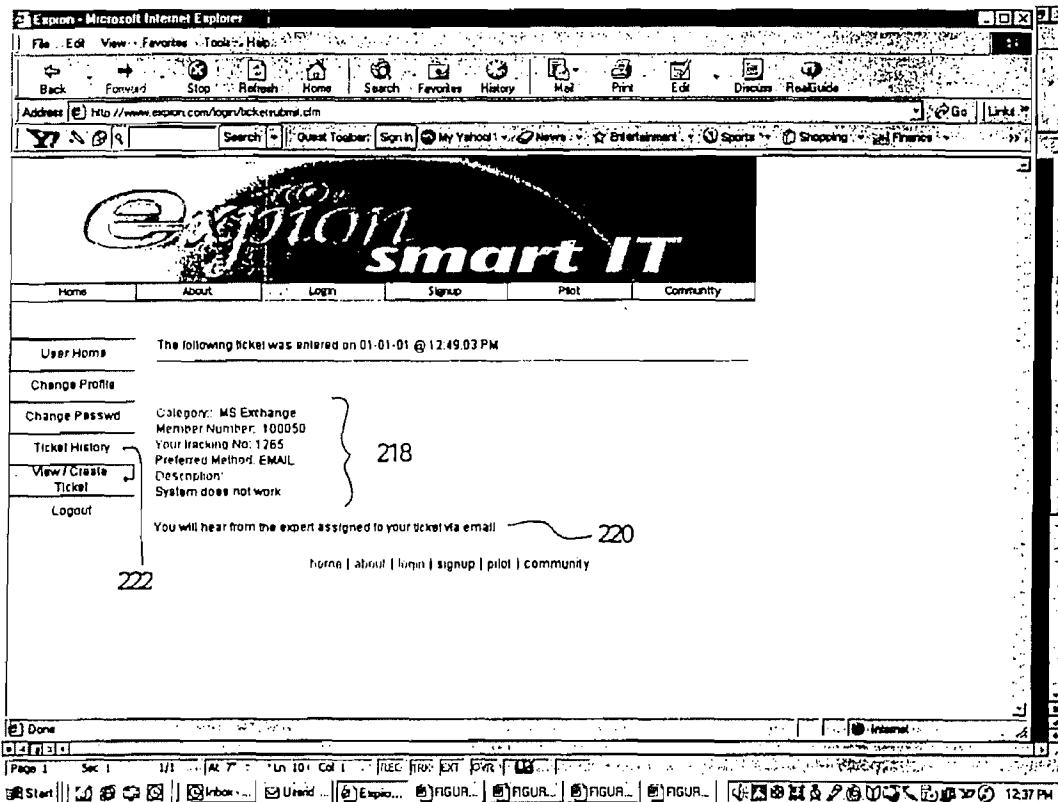
FIGURE 10

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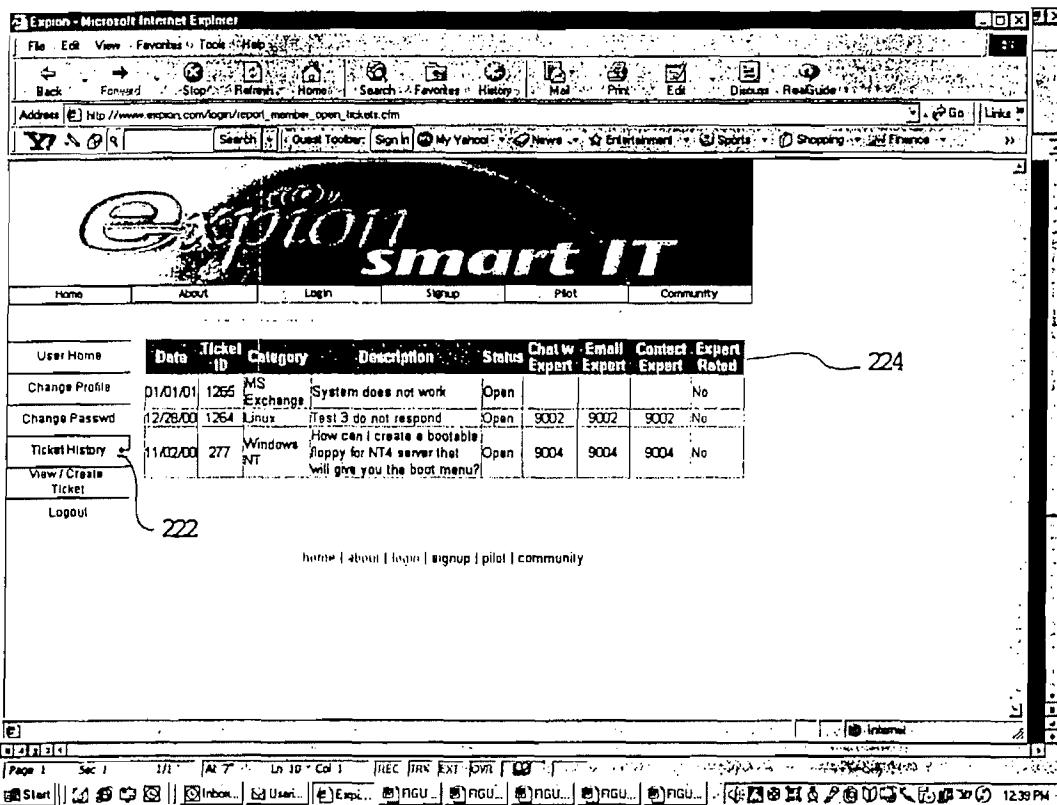
FIGURE 11

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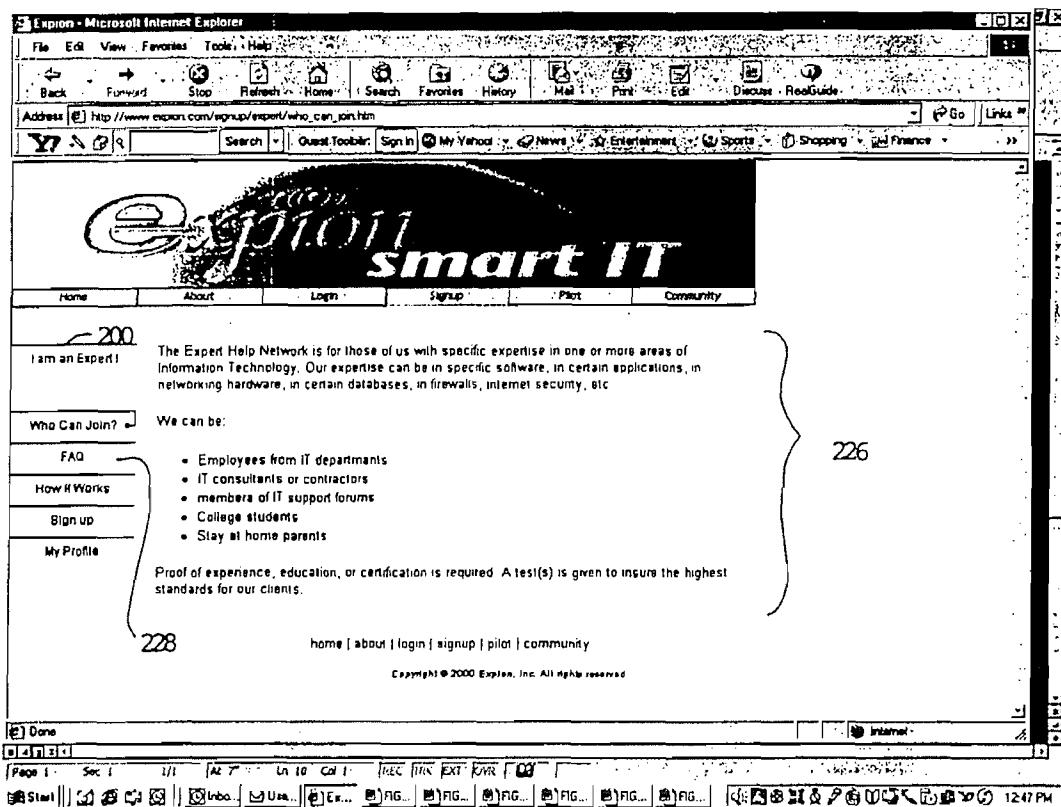
FIGURE 12

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Figure 13

FIGURE 13A

Q. Are there any types of bonuses awarded for referring other Experts to join the Explon team?

A. Absolutely! We are always looking to expand our network of Experts, and we know that the best way to do that is through direct referrals. Therefore, for each referral who successfully joins our team, you will earn extra credit points redeemable for cash.

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Q. Is there a limit to the number of subjects in which I can be an Expert?

A. No, as long as you have the knowledge and experience necessary to be considered an expert in a given subject, you can be an expert in that subject.

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Q. Can customer surveys affect my pay or my standing as an Explon Expert?

A. Customer surveys are an extremely important aspect of our business. They tell us what kind of service we are providing our customers. Therefore, we will utilize a point system where the better rated experts will have a better opportunity to take more tickets and thus earn more money. In the future, we also plan on adding bonuses that are tied to the point system, thus further rewarding experts that provide excellent service.

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home | about | login | signup | pilot | community

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FIGURE 13B

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FIGURE 14

FIGURE 15

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FIGURE 16

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FIGURE 17

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FIGURE 18

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Fig. 19

(12) INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATENT COOPERATION TREATY (PCT)

REVISED VERSION

(54) Title: SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR PROVIDING INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY IT EXPERT REFERRAL OVER A NETWORK

(57) Abstract:

PCT

DECLARATION OF NON-ESTABLISHMENT OF INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

(PCT Article 17(2)(a), Rules 13ter.1(c) and Rule 39)

Applicant's or agent's file reference 2590-002PCT	IMPORTANT DECLARATION	Date of mailing *(day/month/year)* 21/09/2001
International application No. PCT/US 00/ 32028	International filing date *(day/month/year)* 22/11/2000	(Earliest) Priority date *(day/month/year)* 23/11/1999

International Patent Classification (IPC) or both national classification and IPC	G06F17/60

Applicant
STEPHANOU, Dimitri

This International Searching Authority hereby declares, according to Article 17(2)(a), that **no international search report will be established** on the international application for the reasons indicated below

1. [X] The subject matter of the international application relates to:

   a. [ ] scientific theories.

   b. [ ] mathematical theories

   c. [ ] plant varieties.

   d. [ ] animal varieties.

   e. [ ] essentially biological processes for the production of plants and animals, other than microbiological processes and the products of such processes.

   f. [X] schemes, rules or methods of doing business.

   g. [ ] schemes, rules or methods of performing purely mental acts.

   h. [ ] schemes, rules or methods of playing games.

   i. [ ] methods for treatment of the human body by surgery or therapy.

   j. [ ] methods for treatment of the animal body by surgery or therapy.

   k. [ ] diagnostic methods practised on the human or animal body.

   l. [ ] mere presentations of information.

   m. [ ] computer programs for which this International Searching Authority is not equipped to search prior art.

2. [ ] The failure of the following parts of the international application to comply with prescribed requirements prevents a meaningful search from being carried out:

   [ ] the description   [ ] the claims   [ ] the drawings

3. [ ] The failure of the nucleotide and/or amino acid sequence listing to comply with the standard provided for in Annex C of the Administrative Instructions prevents a meaningful search from being carried out:

   [ ] the written form has not been furnished or does not comply with the standard.

   [ ] the computer readable form has not been furnished or does not comply with the standard.

4. Further comments:

Name and mailing address of the International Searching Authority	Authorized officer
European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2 NL-2280 HV Rijswijk Tel. (+31-70) 340-2040, Tx. 31 651 epo nl, Fax: (+31-70) 340-3016	María Rodríguez Nóvoa

FURTHER INFORMATION CONTINUED FROM   PCT/ISA/ 203

The subject-matter claimed in claims 12-22 falls under the provisions of
Article 17(2)(a)(i) and Rule 39.1(iii) PCT, such subject-matter relating
to a method of doing business.

Claims 1-11 relate to commonplace technological features for performing
the business method of the method claims. Although these claims do not
literally belong to the method category, they essentially claim
protection for the same commercial effect as the method claims. With
reference to the Guidelines, B-VIII, points 1-6, the International
Searching Authority considers that searching such commercial features
would serve no useful purpose. This applies to the remaining commonplace
technological features of these claims as well.

The applicant's attention is drawn to the fact that claims relating to
inventions in respect of which no international search report has been
established need not be the subject of an international preliminary
examination (Rule 66.1(e) PCT). The applicant is advised that the EPO
policy when acting as an International Preliminary Examining Authority is
normally not to carry out a preliminary examination on matter which has
not been searched. This is the case irrespective of whether or not the
claims are amended following receipt of the search report or during any
Chapter II procedure. If the application proceeds into the regional phase
before the EPO, the applicant is reminded that a search may be carried
out during examination before the EPO (see EPO Guideline C-VI, 8.5),
should the problems which led to the Article 17(2) declaration be
overcome.